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SUBJECT: GOC FIRES 27 MILITARY OFFICIALS FOR LINKS TO
EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

REF: BOGOTA 3920

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
For Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary:

¶1. (C) President Uribe announced the dismissal of 27 military officers--including two division and three brigade commanders--for their roles in the disappearance and subsequent murders of young men from Soacha and Antioquia. Uribe said a special ministerial commission found that commanders' negligence had enabled some military personnel to engage in criminal activity, including murdering innocent civilians to cover-up their collusion with criminal groups. He said the commission's findings would be forwarded to the Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia), while Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos and Armed Forces Commander Freddy Padilla reiterated their commitment to a "zero" tolerance policy for human rights abuses. Vice Defense Minister Jaramillo predicted more dismissals will follow. Human rights groups applauded the move, but said the GOC needs to do more to solve the extrajudicial killings issue. End Summary.

GOC Vows No Tolerance Policy

¶2. (U) President Alvaro Uribe, Defense Ministry Juan Manuel Santos, and Armed Forces Commander General Freddy Padilla held a press conference on October 29 to announce the dismissal of 27 military officers for their roles in the disappearance and subsequent murders of young men from Soacha and eastern Antioquia. Those dismissed include three generals, four colonels, seven lieutenant colonels, four majors, a captain, a lieutenant, and seven non-commissioned officers. The generals are Major General Roberto Pico Hernandez (Commander of the 7th Division), Brigadier General Jose Joaquin Cortes Franco (Commander of the 2nd Division), and Brigadier General Paulino Coronado Gamez (Commander of the 30th Brigade). The commanders of the 15th Mobile and 14th Brigades were also dismissed. The colonels include the three officers removed from command by Army Commander General Mario Montoya on October 24 (Ref A).

¶3. (U) Uribe said the officers were removed after a special ministerial commission found that commanders' negligence, including failure to follow procedures, enabled some military to engage in crime. He charged that some personnel colluded with criminal groups, murdering innocent civilians to cover up their criminal activity. Uribe said his government would not tolerate the "cowardice of these criminals who assassinated innocent civilians." He said the commission's findings would be passed immediately to the Prosecutor

General's Office (Fiscalia) to facilitate its investigation of the incidents. Santos and Padilla reiterated their commitment to a "zero tolerance" policy for human rights abuses.

14. (C) The three generals have all denied any involvement in the homicides reported in the Soacha cases, and two publicly said they were shocked to learn of their dismissals. Vice Defense Minister Sergio Jaramillo told us Uribe decided to fire the 27 after meeting with Santos and Padilla on the night of October 27. He predicted that more dismissals will likely follow, adding that Uribe has made no decision on the fate of Army Commander Montoya. Jaramillo commented that Montoya faces increasing pressure from his peers to resign.

Human Rights Groups Applaud Move

15. (U) The human rights community reacted positively to the news of the dismissals. Lawyers Collective (Colectivo de Abogados) President Reinaldo Villalba called the actions a "triumph for human rights and a triumph for civil society in Colombia." He added that the GOC has not solved the extrajudicial killing problem, but agreed the GOC had taken a bold first step. Colombian Jurists Commission (Comision Colombiana de Juristas) director Gustavo Gallon said he was pleased by the move and hoped further actions would follow.
BROWNFIELD